

DOCUMENT RESUME

SP 002 649

ED 029 838

The Public Interest in How Teachers Organize.  
Educational Policies Commission, Washington, D.C.

Pub Date 64

Note-10p.

Available from-National Education Association, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 (Packages of 10, \$1.00; single copies not available).

EDRS Price MF-\$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.

Descriptors-\*Public School Teachers. \*Teacher Associations

Teacher associations must preserve the professional unity between administrators and teachers and their independence from special interest groups in society (such as labor). Affiliations with organizations such as labor, which are not suited to the unique characteristics and needs of public education, would undermine the education of children by creating a lack of confidence in schools among parents, reducing teacher influence on legislators holding different views, causing schools to close during disputes because of teacher union solidarity, and weakening the school administrative structure which was created to serve teachers' efforts on behalf of pupils. (LP)

ED029838

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NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES  
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 64-23595

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# The Public Interest in How Teachers Organize

If the quality of education is of importance to this country, then the way educators organize is also important. For an organization of educators influences the quality of the schools. Yet the public, and some members of the teaching profession as well, seem unaware of the relationship. They may know that certain labor leaders are now making a concerted effort to organize teachers in labor unions, and thus to displace the type of organization which is and long has been dominant. But many do not recognize that this matter affects what happens in the classroom; and many have not considered whether it is wise to apply industrial practices and procedures to the educational situation.

The contributions of labor unions have not been to the worker or to the nation's economic strength alone. Organized labor has also given strong support to the development of public education, and it is to be hoped that this support will not flag. But labor organizers are now raising a different question—whether methods which have served the industrial worker well are appropriate for teachers. The Educational Policies Commission believes that these methods are not suitable in the educational situation.

Organizations of educators traditionally have been based on the following general principles: Education is a service profession.

It can render its full service to the public only through persons who are competent and who work in conditions that permit them to use their competence. The major purposes of professional organizations in education are to promote excellence in the work of educators, to generate public support, and to protect and advance the interests of their members.

To serve these purposes, professional organizations in education need a broad and varied program. That is why most of them work at many different tasks:

- enabling educators to share in and contribute to the knowledge and insights of their profession
- seeking the salaries, social status, and conditions of work that will make teaching a rewarding calling and attract more excellent people to it
- recruiting able people for professional service and helping to improve their preparation
- doing advanced thinking and planning for education
- compiling and publishing data needed for public and professional decisions regarding the schools
- keeping the public informed about the schools
- making the voice of educators heard, at all levels of government and among all segments of the population, in behalf of financial and other public support of the schools
- protecting justice and morale by investigating cases of alleged misconduct on the part of educators and others and recommending appropriate action
- protecting the integrity and morale of members of the profession through such provisions as insurance, retirement plans, and security in their professional positions.



These are the contributions to the quality of education which a professional organization can make. Indeed, they seem beyond attainment unless teachers and those who work with them organize, and organize with these ends in view. Furthermore, these ends cannot be attained unless the organization is independent and unless it promotes the unity of classroom teachers, administrators, and other educators.

Independence is important because public education is for all the people. The people entrust their children to the schools when they have confidence in the impartiality of teachers; that confidence is fostered by independence. Moreover, public education is a financial responsibility of all segments of society—not just of organized labor, not just of management, not just of any other group. Its basic strength lies in developing and maintaining the support of the entire society. Professional organizations in education often can improve their services to educators and to education by working with other groups, but their independence must be preserved.

Similarly, professional unity is a precious asset. Effective teaching is a product not only of the quality of the teacher, but also of the quality of the support the teacher receives. Effective teaching requires many supporting services, such as libraries and librarians, subject matter specialists, guidance personnel and services, experts in instructional resources and methods, and support in logistics and planning. School administration is the process by which services are marshaled in support of the teacher. The effective teachers organization is therefore one which helps teachers to act in concert with other members of the professional team.

In the plan of teacher organization which is being promoted by certain labor leaders, the undermining of professional independence and of professional unity would be sought as a matter



of policy. Teachers organizations would sacrifice independence by becoming affiliates of organized labor. Further, by following labor traditions and practices, they would act in terms of the conflict of interests which has generally characterized relations between labor and management. Specifically, they would sacrifice professional unity by tending to regard administrators and school board members as opponents of teachers rather than as their partners. The result would be to jeopardize the quality of the public schools.

Affiliation with a single segment of society would impair confidence in teachers among many of those who must be willing to send their children to the public schools and to pay the bills of public education. Moreover, by allying themselves with a single element of society, teachers would reduce their influence on legislators and other officials representing other views or other constituencies.

Promoting a cleavage between teachers and administrators can be all but catastrophic to the quality of a school. It makes increasingly difficult the cooperative solution of problems and the cooperative meeting of needs. It diverts energy and morale from the educational task. It undermines the very structure which has been created to service the teachers' efforts on behalf of pupils. Yet that is precisely what some organizers of teachers would seek. It is particularly unfortunate that this challenge to the independence and unity of educators, and hence to the quality of education, is coming from representatives of organized labor, who traditionally have been among the supporters of the public schools. It is equally regrettable that divisiveness between teachers and administrators has been promoted by some independent teachers organizations. Whether independent or union-affiliated, teachers or administrators who damage the unity of the profession damage the cause of education.

It is not only harmful but fallacious to assume that the labor-management relationship applies in public schools. Teachers and superintendents are not private employees, and school boards are not private employers. No owner or investor makes a profit, in the usual sense, from the employment of educators. In education all should be, and most are, engaged in pursuit of a common goal—the best possible education for students.

It is true that school board members, superintendents, principals, supervisory personnel, classroom teachers, and even teachers of different subjects or levels inevitably have different, as well as common, areas of concern. They may disagree with each other on many matters, and their right to do so must be protected regardless of position in the school system. But differences among those who deal with schools should not extend to the basic dedication of all to the welfare of students. That common dedication is the only reliable foundation for resolving disagreements without disrupting the effective operation of the schools. Where a cooperative spirit does not exist, it should be urgently sought, not hindered.

When all parties are dedicated to the public service, their legitimate disagreements can be resolved with the assistance of agencies which thoroughly understand the unique characteristics and needs of public education. Such agencies can be set up either privately or by state and local educational bodies. But agencies of labor mediation appear to be unsuitable because their procedures are based on conditions which are not relevant to education, because their primary concern is not education, and because their knowledge of education is likely to be limited.

Thus, the application of labor-relations practices is detrimental to the public welfare and to the professional and personal interests of teachers. It has even resulted in cases in which unionized teachers have refused to cross picket lines established around schools by unions in jurisdictional disputes with one another. This

disregard for the welfare of children and of the public is a flagrant rejection of the ideal that education is a service profession. A matter which has no reference to education must not be permitted to control the actions of teachers organizations.

An organization of educators should have the following characteristics: it should perform many of the functions which contribute both to the betterment of the schools and to the welfare of the teachers; it should be organized independently; and it should promote the unity of teachers, administrators, and other educators. An organization which is consistent with these characteristics helps teachers to do their best for the pupils and for themselves. But organizations which are inconsistent with these characteristics diminish the effectiveness of teaching. That is why the way teachers organize is of great public importance.